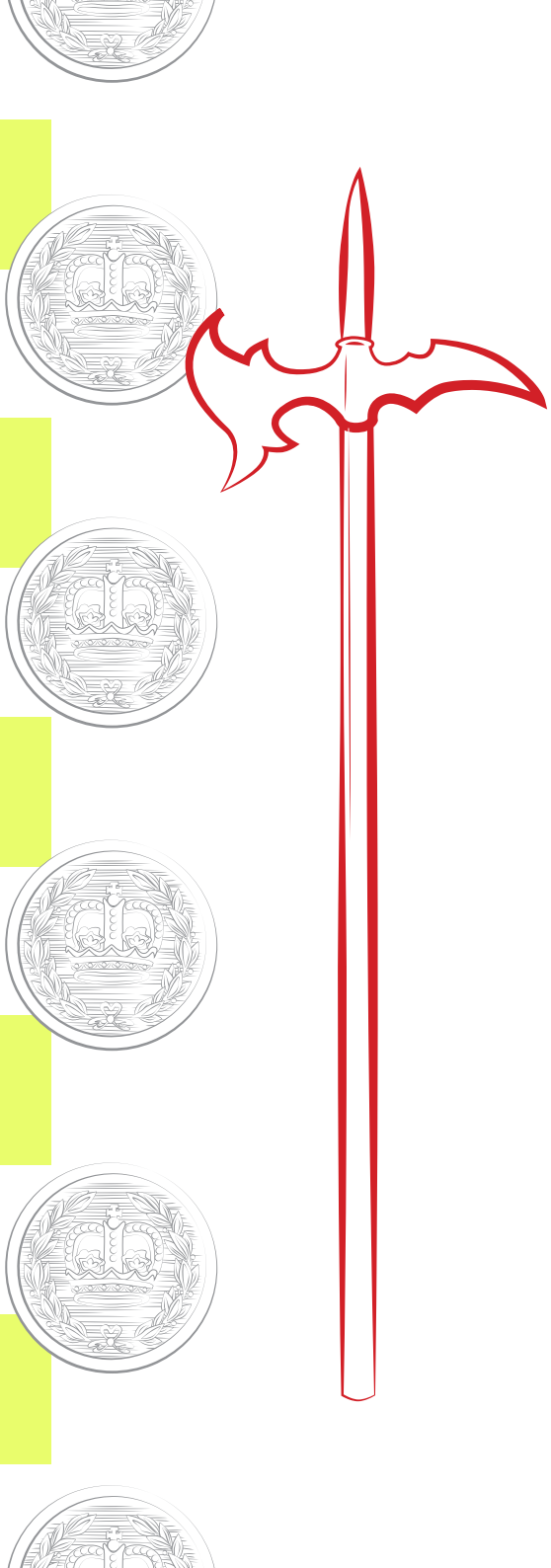


Timeline

Key dates of transformative events

Using artefacts and records to make a timeline that will help to understand social changes and how they've impacted crime and punishment.

157,430 BCE
Palaeolithic

University of Cambridge

Flints

This flint would have been used as a tool for making things by homo heidelbergensis, an ancestor of neanderthals living in Fordwich near canterbury in the north west of the European continent.

4000 BCE
Neolithic

Guildhall Museum, Rochester

Polished Axe Head

North Kent is rich in stone tools – evidence of very early settlers and beautiful objects in themselves.

3130 BCE
Chalcolithic

City Museum of Ljubljana, Slovenia

Ljubljana Marshes Wheel

The oldest wheel we have found. It was used for a two wheeled cart for transport.

3000 BCE
Late Predynastic Period

The Egyptian Museum, Cairo

Narmer Palette

From the temple of Horus at Nekhan, this palette is inscribed with some of the earliest hieroglyphics ever found. it tells the story of Upper and Lower Egypt being unified. This make up palette would have been used in religious ceremonies.

c2500 BCE
Bronze Age

National Museum New Delhi, India

Dancing Girl

Statue of a girl cast in bronze found in Mohenjodaro in the Indus Valley, northwest of India.

c1500 BCE
Bronze Age

Dover Museum and Bronze Age Boat Gallery

Bronze age boat

This is one of the oldest sea-going boats in the world. Built around the time that the final touches were being made to Stonehenge, fifteen centuries before the Romans arrived in Britain and 2,300 years before the Vikings ventured across the North Sea in their longships.

470 BCE
Classical, Greece

Delphi Museum, Greece

The Charioteer

A bronze statue commemorating the Pythian Games from the Sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi. Apollo is the ancient Greek god of the Sun. At his temple in Delphi there was an Oracle, a priestess that would give prophecies from the god that rulers would visit when making big decisions.

50 BCE
Iron Age

Guildhall Museum, Rochester

Gold Staters

11 gold coins concealed within a flint fossilized sponge and found in Higham, Kent, in 1912. Staters were coins kept as treasure before any system of currency existed in Britain.

100 CE
Roman

Guildhall Museum, Rochester

Quern or millstone

Made from ‘puddingstone,’ a conglomerate that occurs naturally in Hertfordshire, these querns were used at early Roman British villas in Kent for grinding wheat grain. Before long the Romans were importing rough lava stone to make their mills more effective.

c600 CE
Anglo-Saxon

National Museums Liverpool, World Museum

Situla or ritual bucket

This bucket was found on railway land in Higham, Kent, in an Anglo-Saxon grave. It's made of wood with bronze fittings and charms hanging from its frame. Like all similar objects, it appears to have been deliberately broken before being placed in the grave.

c800 CE
Medieval - Viking

DigVentures, Durham University

Tafl (king) Game Piece

A rare, glass gaming piece discovered in Lindisfarne – the tiny Northumbrian island whose wealthy early medieval monastery was infamously raided by Vikings in 793 CE, heralding the start of the Viking Age in Britain.

1086 CE
Medieval - Norman

The National Archive, London

Domesday Book

The oldest government record held in The National Archives. It's a survey of land ownership of England and parts of Wales which William the Conqueror asked to be made after he became king.

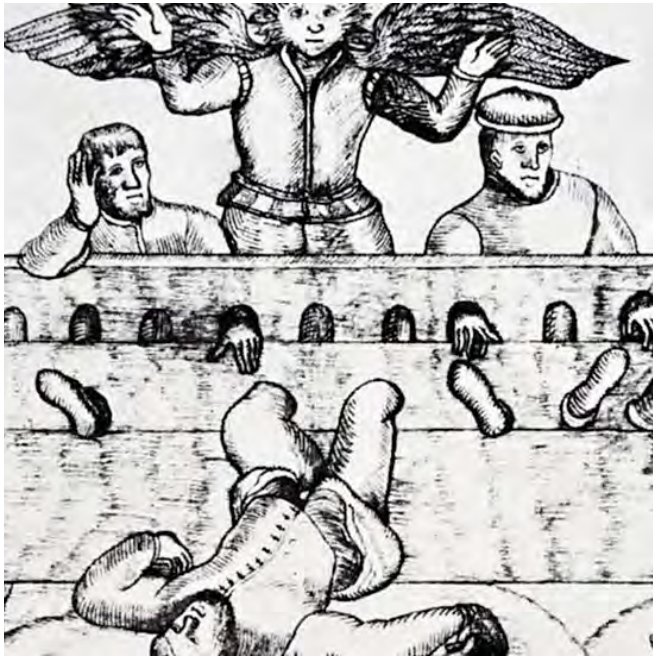
1350 CE
Medieval

Old woman at Ratcliffe Highway, 1834, John Ashton

Scolding

After 1350, scolding (using abusive speech in public) started to be considered a crime. It tended to be women who were accused of this crime, and they might be dunked on a stool into water or wear a type of gag to prevent them talking as punishment.

1351 CE
Medieval



Sitting in stocks

Stocks and Pillory

Introduced as a punishment for workers that left jobs without permission, these were popular for crimes like swearing or drunkenness. Local people might throw rotten food or even stones. They gradually stopped being used. The last criminals punished this way were in the 19th century.

1377 CE
Goryeo Dynasty, Korea

The Jikji scroll, National Library of France, Paris

Printing With Metal Type

The world's oldest printed text, this scroll was kept hidden in a Buddha statue unnoticed for centuries. The French deputy ambassador to Korea, Victor Collin de Plancy took The Jikji to Paris along with other historical Korean books at the end of the 19th century.

1215 CE
Medieval

Magna Carta, Royal Charters of Faversham, 1300

Magna Carta

This English Charter acknowledged for the first time that people had legal rights and that laws could apply to kings and queens too. The Magna Carta was also the first step in giving us the right to a trial by a jury of our peers.

1536–1541 CE
Tudor

FAVERSHAM ABBEY OUTER GATEWAY
(FOUNDED 1147)
NORTHWARD FROM HERE, TILL 1538
WAS THE PRECINCT OF FAVERSHAM ABBEY.
THE ARCHWAY WAS DEMOLISHED IN 1772
BUT THIS EASTERN PORTION OF THE
GATEHOUSE (C 1250) NOW FORMS
PART OF ARDEN'S HOUSE.
IT INCORPORATED A SMALL CHAPEL
FOR THE USE OF ABBEY GUESTS
AND THE WINDOW CAN
STILL BE SEEN.

Faversham Abbey remembrance plaque

Dissolution of the monasteries

Henry VIII makes himself head of the newly formed church of England. By closing the monasteries the crown receives money and land which Henry can use as he pleases. Social services that the monasteries usually provide are taken away as a result.

1541 CE
Tudor

Ordeal by water woodcut,1613

Witch Trials

Henry VIII's Witchcraft Act makes practicing as a witch punishable by death. it's not until 1735 that the law changes and witches are to be punished as con artists instead. Even now, charging people to cast spells could get you in trouble with consumer protection regulations.

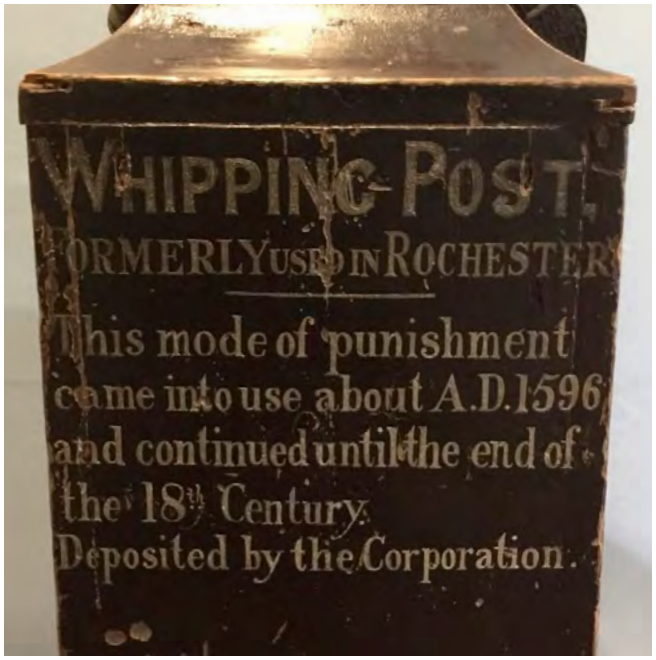
1567 CE
Elizabethan

Chatham Dockyard 1750, Joseph Farington, Royal Museums Greenwich

Chatham Dockyard

For many years the Medway had been used as a safe anchorage point for the King's Ships. Ships for sailing near and far around the globe were built here. The Navy continued to use the dockyard up until 1984. Today it is a museum you can visit to find out more about its history.

1601 CE
Elizabethan


WHIPPING POST
FORMERLY USED IN ROCHESTER
This mode of punishment
came into use about A.D.1596
and continued until the end of
the 18th Century
Deposited by the Corporation

Whipping post, Guildhall Museum, Rochester

The Poor Law

Local taxes provided support for the poor in the area and to provide work for them. Those who refused work were whipped and sent to a house of correction. Beggars were whipped until their back bled, and were then sent back to their place of birth.

1601 CE
Elizabethan

THE LONDON GAZETTE.

Published by Authority.

From Monday, Septemb 3, to Monday, Septemp 10, 1666.

Whitehall, Sept. 8.

THE ordinary course of this paper having been interrupted by a sad and lamentable accident of Fire lately happed in the City of *London*: it hath been thought fit for satisfying the minds of so many of His Majesties good Subjects who must needs be concerned for the Issue of so great an accident, to give this short, but true Accompt of it.

On the second instant, at one of the clock in the Morning, there hapned to break out, a sad in deplorable Fire in *Pudding-lane*, neer *New Fish-street*, which falling out at that hour of the night, and in a quarter of the Town so close built with wooden pitched houses spread itself so far before day, and with such distraction to the inhabitants and Neighbours, that care was not taken for the timely prevent.ng the further diffusion of it, by pulling down houses, as ought to have been; so that this lamentable Fire in a short time became too big to be mastred by any Engines or working neer it. It fell out most unhappily too, That a violent Easterly wind fomented it, and kept it burning all that day, and the night following spreading itself up to *Grace-church-street* and downwards from *Cannon-street* to the Water-side, as far as the *Three Cranes in the Vintry*.

The people in all parts about it, distracted by the vastness of it, and their particular care to carry away their Goods, many attempts were made to prevent the spreading of it by pulling down Houses, and making great Intervals, but all in vain, the Fire seizing upon the Timber and Rubbish, and so continuing it set even through those spaces, and *Church*, neer *Holborn-bridge*, *Pie-corner*, *Aldersgate*, *Cripple-gate*, neer the lower end of *Coleman-street*, at the end of *Basin-hall-street* by the *Postern* at the upper end of *Bishopsgate-street* and *Leadenhall-street*, at the *Standard* in *Cornhill* at the church in *Fenchurch street*, neer *Cloth-workers Hall* in *Mincing-lane*, at the middle of *Mark-lane*, and at the *Tower-dock*.

On Thursday by the blessing of God it was wholly beat down and extinguished. But so as that Evening it unhappily burst out again a fresh at the *Temple*, by the falling of some sparks (as is supposed) upon a Pile of Wooden buildings; but his Royal Highness who watched there that whole night in Person, by the great labours and diligence used, and especially by applying Powder to blow up the Houses about it, before day most happily mastered it.

Divers Strangers, Dutch and French were, during the fire, apprehended, upon suspicion that they contributed mischievously to it, who are all imprisoned, and Informations prepared to make a severe inquisition here upon by my Lord Chief Justice *Keeling*, assisted by some of the Lords of the Privy Council; and some principal Members of the City, notwithstanding which suspicion, the manner of the burning all along in a Train, and so blowen forwards in all its way by strong Winds, make us conclude the whole was an effect of an unhappy chance, or to speak better, the heavy hand of God upon us for our sins, shewing us the terrour of his Judgement in thus raising the Fire, and immediately after his miraculous and never to be acknowledged Mercy, in putting a stop to it when we were in the last despair, and that all attempts for quenching it however industriously

The London Gazette, The fire of London article, 1666,

Newspapers

The publication of news was controlled during Queen Elizabeth I's reign. All printing was by royal charter (approval) in London, and at the University of Cambridge or University of Oxford or you would be fined.

1640 CE
Stuart

A true deſcription of the racking and cruell handeling of Cutbert Simſon in the Tower.
The grating of an Arrowe through Cutbert Simſons fingers.
Cutbert Simſon vpon the racke.

The Torture of Cuthbert Simpson , john Foxe,'s Actes and Monuments 1563, British Library

Torture Warrants

To get information, suspects could be hung from manacles or stretched on the rack. John Archer was the last recorded warrant for judicial torture. Accused of high treason after his arrest during a riot, Archer was tortured on the rack, but his torturers learned nothing.

1649 - 1660 CE
Interregnum

Oldest football, Smith Museum Stirling, 1540

Puritan Laws

Charles I was executed after losing a Civil War to an army loyal to Parliament. Government was then led by a Commonwealth of MPs, then a Protectorate under Oliver Cromwell. This government banned entertainments like football on a Sunday, swearing and celebrating Christmas day and Easter.

1679 CE
Georgian

Old Bailey, The Central Criminal Court, London, 1808

Habeas Corpus Act

Another important step towards the right to a fair trial, this law protected and extended the right of a detained person to go before a judge to determine whether the detention was legal.

1687 CE
Georgian

The Guildhall Museum, Rochester

The Guildhall Rochester

Built as a court room and council chamber. Now houses a local history museum which moved here in 1980. You can visit today and see the courtroom upstairs. Hidden under the building are prison cells where the accused were held before their trial.

1689 CE
Georgian

Bill of Rights, Parliamentary Archives

English Bill of Rights

This limited the powers of kings and queens. It included the freedom to petition the monarch (a step towards political protest rights); the freedom from cruel and unusual punishments and the freedom from being fined without trial.

1735 CE
Georgian

Watchmen going on duty 1808 by John Ashton, 1886

Watchmen

Before watchmen people were expected to volunteer to keep an eye out for crime. Watchmen patrolled their section of road as a defence against crime and fire. They also had the job of calling out the time and describing the weather.

1760 CE
Georgian

Industry and idleness, 1747, Hogarth

Industrial Revolution

By 1760, Britain was importing large amounts of cotton and silk and weaving them into fabrics. The building of factories, water power, steam power, new machinery and canals to transport goods all helped to change the way people lived.

1763 CE
Georgian

Dick Turpin, Highwayman

Bow street horse patrol

Introduced by Sir John Fielding as the first organized mounted police force. This was to protect the now busier roads and horse-drawn coaches from highwaymen.

1773 CE
Georgian

Map of a typical Village pre 1760

Enclosure Act

This law helped landowners to restrict access to common land. By replacing the open fields system they aimed to increase productivity. However that meant more private land ownership and people moved off the land they had communally farmed.

1776 CE
Georgian

Loading prisoners at Portsmouth Harbour, National Library of Australia

Prison Hulks

There were over 200 crimes that were punishable by death at this time, but Judges preferred transportation as punishment for crimes like stealing. Parliment agreed old ships could be used as prisons temporarily as gaols were overcrowded, but they were still being used until 1850.

1777 CE
Georgian

John Howard by James Gillray, 1788, NPG, London

John Howard's report on prisons

His main observations were; prisoners were not separated by gender or type of crime, many prisoners were dying of illness and disease, gaolers/jailers were often corrupt and the prisons were not safe or secure.

1787 CE
Georgian

Plymouth, Coplestone Warre Bampfylde c 1720, Royal Albert Memorial Museum and Art Gallery

Transportation to Australia

Britain had been sending criminals across the Atlantic since the early 17th century to work as cheap labour. After the war in America made this impossible, Australia and New Zealend were used instead. The first fleet of convicts set sail from Plymouth to Botany Bay, arriving in 1788.

1817 CE
Georgian

Elizabeth Fry by G Richmond, 1843, NPG, London

Elizabeth Fry

The Association for the Reformation of the Female Prisoners in Newgate is formed by Elizabeth Fry and other quakers. Fry gave evidence to a House of Commons committee on prison conditions, many of her ideas influenced the 1823 Gaols Act.

1826/7 CE
Bourbon Restoration, France

'point de vue', university of Texas, Austin

Photograph

'Point de vue' the world's first photograph – or at least the oldest surviving photo taken by Joseph Nicéphore Niépce using a technique known as heliography at Niépce's estate in Burgundy, France.

1823 CE
Georgian

Photograph of Chatham Prison

Gaols Act

Legislation saying that prisons should be made secure; gaolers should be paid; female prisoners should be kept separately from male prisoners; doctors and chaplains should visit prisons and lastly, attempts should be made to reform prisoners.

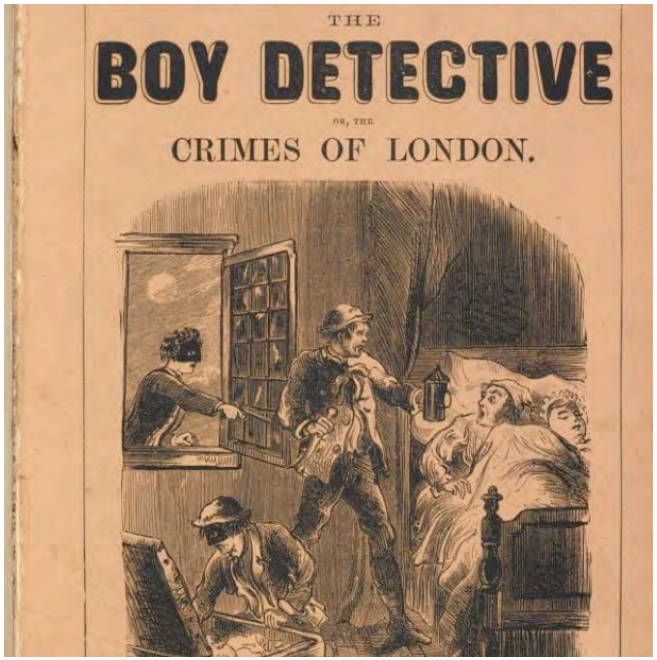
1829 CE
Georgian

Photo of peelers, 1870

The Metropolitan Police

Founded by Sir Robert Peel in London and known as ‘Peelers’, they were the UK’s first Police force.

1830 CE
Georgian



Penny Dreadful, British Library

Penny Dreadfuls

For the first time cheap books were available to the working classes, these were often sensationalised true crime stories.

1837 CE
Victorian

Queen Victoria, 1882, Alexander Bassano, National Portrait Gallery, London

Queen Victoria

Victorian age begins with the coronation of Queen Victoria.

1845 CE
Victorian

SS Great Britain, Bristol

Full steam ahead

The first iron steamship to cross the Atlantic was designed by Brunel, it took the ship 14 days to travel from Liverpool to New York. In the early days of sailing it could take up to 90 days to cross the Atlantic ocean.

1856 CE
Victorian

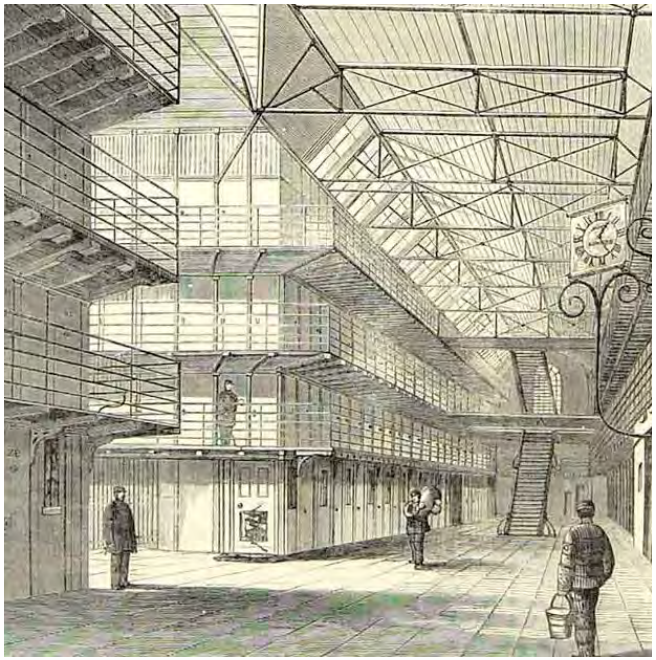


Illustration of Chatham prison interior, 1856

Chatham convict prison opens

Children were punished the same as adults and kept in the same prisons. Prisoners were put to hard labour building coastal defences along the river, before transportation to Australia. The labour broke many prisoners, they would purposely maim themselves to get time off.

1856 CE
Victorian

Ruxton, Kent's first Chief Constable, 1857, Kent Police Museum, Faversham

County and Borough Police Act

All towns and counties in England and Wales have to set up a proper full-time, paid police force.

1858 CE
Victorian

DEEP SEA SECTION OF THE FIRST
TRANS-ATLANTIC SUBMARINE CABLE
PRESENTED BY CHARLES GOODSALL
ON HIS RETIREMENT, MAY. 1953.
THIS IS A SAMPLE OF THE FIRST ATLANTIC CABLE
MADE IN 1858. THE TWO HALVES OF WHICH WERE
ARMOURED WITH OPPOSITE LAYS, AND COULD NOT
BE SUCCESSFULLY JOINTED. THE SAMPLE WAS MADE
BY THE DONORS GRANDFATHER AND HAS BEEN IN
THE POSSESSION OF HIS FAMILY FOR 90 YEARS.

Transatlantic Cable, Science Museum, London

Transatlantic Communications

This is a sample of the first deep sea transatlantic cable. The first telegram communications between the UK and the USA were made using this in 1858.

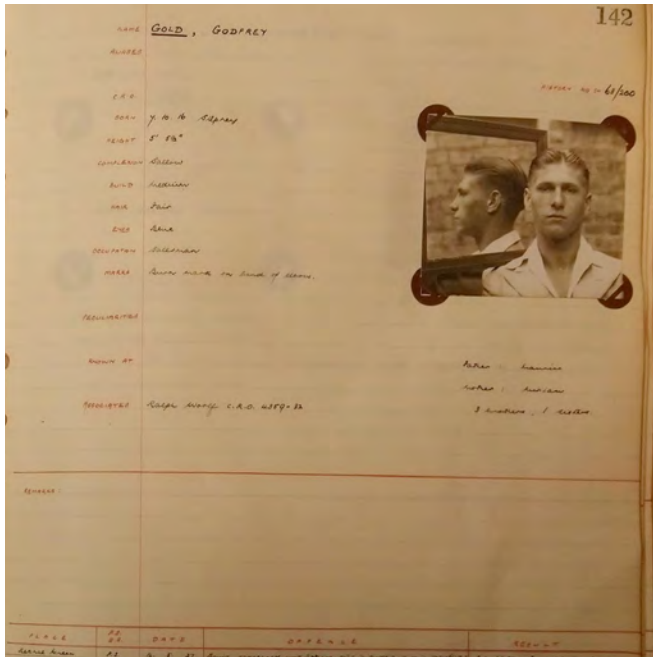
1860 CE
Victorian

Police Section House, 2025

Police Section House (Docking Station)

It was required that all Royal Docks would be policed by the Metropolitan Police force. Buildings like this were built in the dockyards to provide living accommodations for the police officers.

1869 CE
Victorian

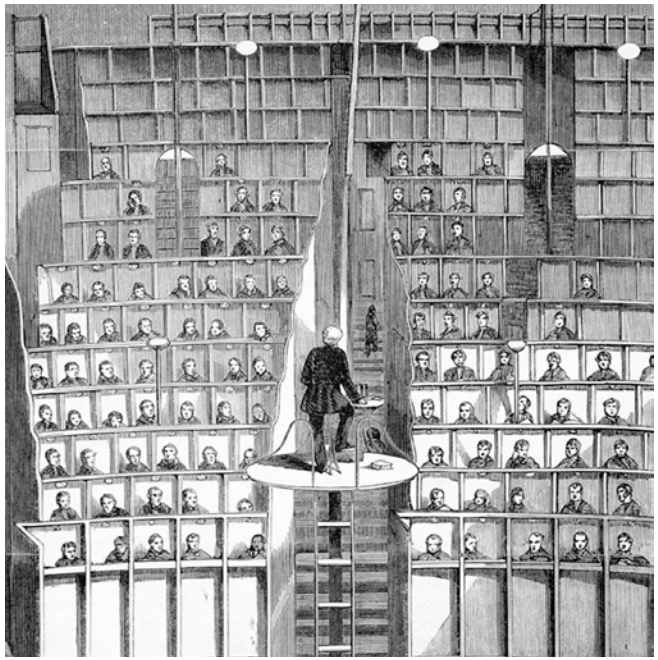


Police record book, Kent Police Museum, Faversham

Criminal Record

The modern system of national record-keeping was established by the Habitual Criminals Act 1869 and the Prevention of Crimes Act 1871, which required police to keep records of convicted offenders on a national level.

1877 CE
Victorian



Wandsworth, 1862

HM Prisons

The Government brought all prisons under its control. This is a drawing of the Adult school in the chapel, part of the separate system at the Surrey House of Correction.

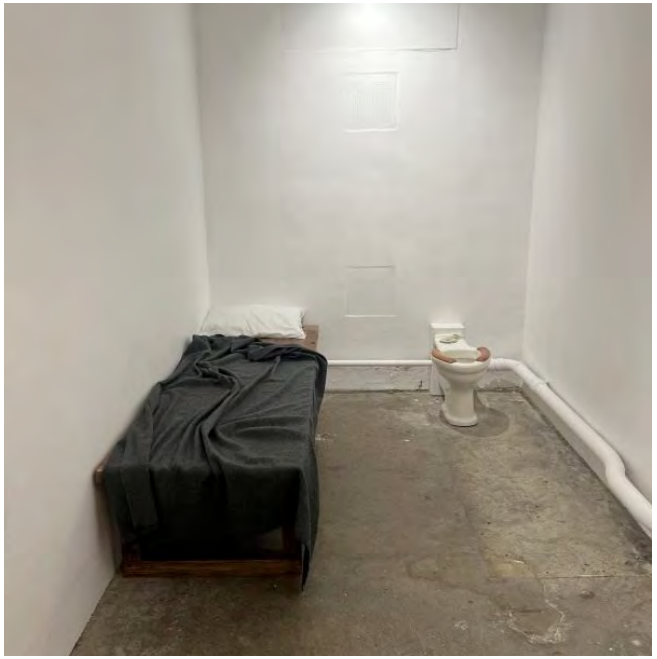
1896 CE
Victorian

Walter Arnold's Benz Motor Carriage

Speeding

Walter Arnold became the first person to get a speeding ticket. He was driving through Paddock Green in Kent at 8 mph, four times the speed limit of 2 mph, and was caught by a policeman on a bicycle.

1899 CE
Victorian



Prison cell at Kent Police Museum, Faversham

Kent Police Matrons

The wives of the lock-up keepers were paid a shilling a day or part thereof for their services as Police Matrons, They were to supervise and search female and child offenders. The cells would be double locked one key held by the matron and the other by the lock up keeper.

1901 CE
20th Century

Finger prints

Fingerprinting

Fingerprints have been used as signatures and identifiers for thousands of years, however it's not until this time that police start to use them in criminal investigations.

1902 CE
20th Century

Rochester Borstal, 1967

Borstals

Rochester Borstal opens in Kent, for the first time children were separated from adults. Designed to educate and reform young offenders as an alternative to prison, there were strict rules in borstals, and until 1962, boys in borstals were whipped.

1907 CE
20th Century

Sign outside a Probabtion Service Building, 2025

Probation is introduced

As an alternative to prison, or at the end of a prison sentence offenders can receive probation. They have to follow a set of rules laid down by the court, report to the police once a week and meet regularly with a probation officer.

1908 CE
20th Century

PC3 George Henry with Airedale Terrier, Hull

Dog Section

Terriers Jim, Vic, Mick, and Ben began patrolling Hull Docks in 1908 for the North Eastern Railway Police. Superintendent J Dobie was inspired by police dogs in Belgium. They were trained to guard areas and protect officers by attacking individuals not wearing a uniform.

1914 CE
20th Century

Female Police Patrol, Euston Station, 1918, Iimperial War Museum, London

The Women's Police Service

Founded by Nina Boyle from the Women's Freedom League, and musician and philanthropist Margaret Damer Dawson. It was a national voluntary organization of women police officers from 1914 to 1940. It helped to show the importance of including women in the police force.

1920 CE
20th Century

First mixed jury, Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette

Ladies of the jury

The first female jurors were sworn in at Bristol Quarter Sessions on 29 July 1920, where they heard evidence in the case against William Henry Ayton, 52, who was accused of stealing parcels at Weston-super-Mare station.

1922 CE
20th Century

Marconi with his wireless radio set up, London

The Wireless

The first BBC news broadcast was a news bulletin read by Arthur Burrows on November 14, 1922, from London's 2LO station. The bulletin included a court report, details on London fog, and billiards scores.

1934 CE
20th Century

Wakefield training prison and camp, 1944, Imperial War Museum, London

Open Prisons

The first of its kind, New Hall open prison had more relaxed rules. The land for this camp was acquired in 1933. "Parties of prisoners conveyed daily from Wakefield Prison cleared the woodland for cultivation and gradually erected the camp"– original photo caption, Imperial War Museum.

1948 CE
20th Century

Eleanor Roosevelt holding the declaration, 1949

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

After WWII the United Nations made this declaration which is the foundation of modern human rights. It sets out a range of rights and freedoms to which everyone, everywhere in the world, is entitled.

1949 CE
20th Century

Dame Rose Helibron

Women in Law

In 1949 Rose Heilbron and Helena Normanton became the UK's first female barristers, and in 1972 Dame Rose went on to become the first female judge to sit at the Old Bailey.

1959 CE
20th Century

Mini Cooper, 1961, The British Motor Museum

The Mini Car

The UK's first compact car is built by British Motoring Company and called the Morris Mini-Minor.

1960 CE
20th Century

Cameras in Trafalgar square

CCTV

The met police installed temporary cameras in Trafalgar Square to monitor crowds for a state visit. This was the start of increased use of video surveillance in public spaces, with cities beginning to experiment with the technology throughout the 1960's.

1964 CE
20th Century

Pye ‘Pocketfone’ PF1

Pocket radio

The police used the telegraph from cars, police telephone boxes and other communication solutions until the 1960’s when two way radios became small and affordable enough that all police could use them on the go. The pocketfone had two parts, a reciever and a transmitter.

1965 CE
20th Century

Protest against the death penalty

No more death penalty for murder

In 1861, the death penalty was abolished for all crimes except murder; high treason; piracy with violence; and arson in the royal dockyards. It took until 1998 for it to be abolished all together including treason and piracy with violence.

1966 CE
20th Century

NASA photograph

Photos from space

On August 23 a lunar orbiter snapped this first image of Earth from the Moon. The incredible image was captured during the orbiter’s 16th lap around the Moon.

1986 CE
20th Century

Laboratory for testing DNA

DNA

The first time DNA is used in a criminal investigation in the UK to convict a murder. This led to the UK national DNA Data bank.

1988 CE
20th Century

Wetherby Young Offenders Institution, 2016

Young Offenders

Young Offenders Institutions are set up for 18 to 21 yr olds and replace the old Borstals. These are a last resort after probation and non-custodial sentences. Young offenders can also be sent to secure training centres, secure children's homes or juvenile prisons.

1989 CE
20th Century

Telephone for internet connection, Science Museum

The Internet

Tim Berners-Lee submits his proposal for the World Wide Web at CERN, a project to share information more easily across networks. In 1993 CERN make the World Wide Web available for anyone to use. All you needed was a telephone line to connect and a computer.

1990 CE
20th Century

Electronic tag, 1999, Science Museum

GPS electronic tags

These give the offenders' location. People who are tagged have a curfew, meaning they must be at home at certain times of the day or night. Many people tagged are also banned from going to certain places.

1998 CE
20th Century

Early Google landing page

Google

Search engines made it easier for people access the internet. Now you could find websites and information by asking questions, you didn't need to know the exact address of a page that you were looking for.

2002 CE
21st Century

Police officer accessing I-24/7, 2002, INTERPOL

Global database

A global secure communications service known as I-24/7 gives access to INTERPOL's databases and services. Canada (pictured here) was the first member country to connect in 2003, and by 2007 all countries had overcome technical challenges and were connected; some by satellite.

2010 CE
21st Century

BBC Bitesize diagram for the Equalitiy Act 2010

The Equality Act

This legislation combines many earlier separate laws and helps protect everyone against discrimination for example due to their race, disability, age or gender.

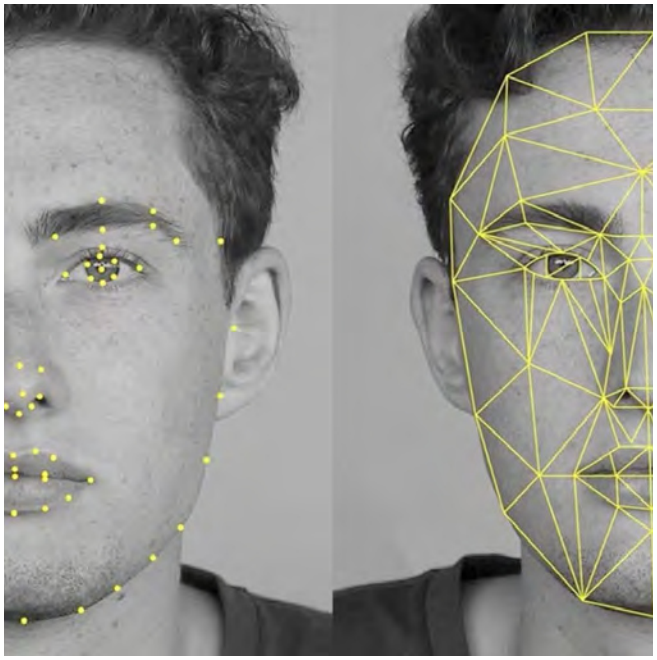
2015 CE
21st Century

Devon and Cornwall drone unit, BBC News

Drones

The first drone unit to be launched in the UK was in Devon and Cornwall. The drones help to find missing people, combat wildlife crime and gather evidence to secure court convictions. Some of the drones have a police livery and are equipped with zoom cameras and thermal imaging.

2017 CE
21st Century



Computer software mapping faces for identification.

Facial Recognition

As CCTV has become more common, it's possible to use this technology to track criminals, however it cannot be used as evidence in court for conviction. The first arrest in the UK using facial recognition was in 2017.